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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

RICHMOND IN SURRY,

OCTOBER 24, 1773,

THE SUNDAY PRECEEDING

HIS MAJESTY'S INAUGURATION.

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Righteousness the certain Foundation of national Security, Reputation, and Happiness.

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BY

GEORGE LAUGHTON, D.D. *k*

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MDCCLXXXIII.

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PROVERBS xiv. 34.

Righteousness exalteth a Nation.

A Regular attention to Religion and Virtue, proceeds from a just deference and regard for the most sublime directions, and is productive of effects in the spiritual, moral, and social world, eminently advantageous. A human Being launching into the scenes of life, collects his ideas from the objects before him, forms notions, and links principles according to the intelligence he selects, or has conveyed to him: Nature herself denotes a grand object of adoration and love, and fills the heart with awful reverence for the great and good God. But the divine transactions independent on the visible Creation, the wonders of Revelation, the glorious dispensations of Providence, and interposition to rescue man from misery, are truths above the sphere of Nature, which dilate the genius, raise the imagination, exalt the soul, and teach us to pay the Author of all existence, the reverence and regard due to his Attributes, to admire his goodness circulating through all the Creation, and endeavour to deserve his particular affection, the
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highest point of human Glory: on this basis, man's felicity, temporal and eternal, is immovably founded.

As the order of Nature, however beautiful and expressive of a divine hand, is incomparable to supernatural excellencies; so inadequate must the best human actions and acquisitions be, to the Attributes and Goodness of the Creator. In this proportion we must measure the best of human accomplishments, with divine; perfection is the sole property of God; a resemblance to that perfection, which good men aspire to, is all that mortality can admit of: the more striking the transcript is, the more of God they impress on their Nature, the more harmony and excellence will appear in their actions, and the more refined mortality will fill their hearts.

It is the essential nature of order to establish concord and unity, and of perfection to display every thing in the most pleasing, as well as most exalted rank within its sphere. To instance a few dispensations in Nature: we there see a beautiful regularity and variety, every thing adapted to its particular use, each element fitted to its employ, and each animal shaped and accommodated to the element it is to inhabit, endued with organs and faculties proper for its natural element and province of action: we there behold beauties calculated to delight the eye, delicacies to entertain the taste, melodious sounds to please the ear, and the richest fragrance to delight the smell, the glorious orbs of superior splendor to ravish and amaze the mind, and infinite other parts of the universe, wonder-

wonderfully formed in order, exactness, regularity, and perfection.

Moral goodness, and a just conduct of our mental faculties are on the line of perfection, and no less replete with beauties in man, than those external excellencies adapted to the senses, are in the world; they are an emanation of the Divine Nature, and dispensation of God, suited to the sphere of human ability, and are not fruitless endowments, but of vast and sublime consequence. Thereby God shews his design of exerting his wisdom and power in their favour, of protecting them from danger, and giving them whatever is necessary and proper for them, spiritual and temporal, an assurance of a regular communication of his grace on earth, and glory in heaven: this blessed intercourse sets man in the highest order of this lower world, warms his soul with celestial fire, animates his thoughts, and is the spring of benevolence and good actions.

The mind, under this sublime direction, can approve of nothing but what is good: the heart feels the dictate, and reason leads her to whatever is worthy and laudable. The universal beneficence, which God daily extends to his creatures, is her established principle: humanity, which our senses and the texture of our constitution point out, which Nature and Philosophy recommend for general conveniency, is here ennobled; not drawn forth by mere human sensations, but founded on spiritual reasons. A sympathy of nature in a being so happily endowed, makes him act according to the

divine will ; and righteousness, inherent in the great guide of all his thoughts and designs, branches out from him in general affection and beneficence.

Virtue thus descended, appears in the world with irresistible force, receives the applause and approbation of mankind. It has such intrinsic worth, that even the abandoned assume its garb ; and the less honest act under its appearance to execute their oppressive designs, and sometimes render it difficult to discover the real, from the feigned virtuous ; however, a near inspection seldom leaves a doubt. In determining the character, the object of the latter is self, and all his pursuits are reducible to the same point ; whilst the mean idea of self, never enters the imagination of the former. His Virtue is from God : and in his intercourse with men, prompts him to inform the ignorant, enlighten his understanding, and lead him in the way of Righteousness ; induces him to feed the hungry, cloath the naked, and pour the balm of comfort into the bosom of wretchedness and affliction. Such a one never flanders another's reputation, is ever ready to do justice to merit and character, rectify mistakes, soften the invidious, and sooth the warmth of anger, and violence of faction.

The mind, some have thought, cannot be always on the stretch of Virtue, but must at seasons relax its strings, and be either supine, or what but a little exceeds it, be vicious. But this is founded on error : the virtuous man may undoubtedly at times amuse himself with innocent speculations and entertainments,
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without any virtuous aim, and be frequently disengaged from virtuous actions ; but this is not so to relax the strings of Virtue, as to infringe its real excellence. If by relaxation we mean amusement, delight, and joy ; the virtuous mind receives no greater satisfaction, no higher delight and joy, than in the exercise of its ability : the blessings of the comforted fill the soul with extatic raptures.

A person indued with these principles, must be consistent ; and to be depended on, his motives are from God, and has no expectation of reward, until mortality is swallowed up in Glory. In his intercourse with the world, he judges of mankind by his own sensations : knowing the fluctuating nature of the body, and how much the soul suffers with its infirmities, he feels for it, as for himself ; gives all the spiritual and human aid in his power ; and rejoices at another's prosperity, as with his brother, and the child of the same God and Father of all.

If we look into civil society, and seek for the most amiable part of it, do we not find those most venerated and admired, who fill their various stations with integrity and honour ? Is there not a certain grandeur of character inherent in those, who justly execute their engagements with mankind ? What is more respectable than a good father, a dutiful child, a sincere friend, a good subject, and a just judge ? What is more worthy of estimation than Veracity, Charity and Beneficence ? These qualities do honour to human nature, raise the reputation of kingdoms, and secure the peace of empire.

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The mind, thus ennobled by Virtue, beams forth in elegance and beauty : the passions subdued, leave the genius cool and undisturbed. The body, full of health by temperance, concurs with the vigorous operations of the mind ; which having no burden on it to make it apprehensive for its eternal or temporal welfare, looks into the transactions of the world with penetration and precision, discerns the tendency and effects of early steps, and conducts itself with steady wisdom, magnanimity and resolution ; is firm in the midst of danger, unawed by threats or virulence, unmoved by the glare of opulence and splendor.

Fidelity in employments, integrity in the mercantile world, vigilance and honour in national concerns, not only diffuse happiness through society, but establish its reputation in foreign climes, raise a character essential to the strength and affluence of a commercial state, and are of unalterable and perpetual force, however variable the mode of acting and thinking may be. Improvements in arts, sciences, urbanity and civilization, affect the morals of mankind : a certain refinement of sentiment flows from rational improvements, and the more exalted discoveries of genius expand the mind with more honourable thoughts of the Deity : but such is the weakness of human ability, that these acquisitions, which generally fill the heart with happiness and attachment to God, are sometimes destructive of it, shut out humility, and introduce scepticism and infidelity.

When the pride of knowledge has tainted the soul, every beautiful discovery drawn forth from the womb
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of Nature, contributes to the malady, and spreads the contagion through all its faculties: it arrogates to itself the power of Creation, and independently prides itself, in the works of a genius which God commanded into action. This defection from righteousness gives the passions a weight in Nature, superior to the force of reason; opens the sluices of licentiousness and corruption, and, as the smallest bruise in the most beautiful fruit soon corrupts the whole, flows through every branch of society.

We need not have recourse to the days of barbarism or more polished ages, to perceive that licentiousness is not merely the inhabitant of the palace, or corruption the bane of the splendid fortune. The quality of food or raiment cannot constitute intemperance: and we every day see as much debauchery and profaneness beneath the thatched cottage, as under the superb pavillion and gilded ceiling. It is the heart, not the rank which is infected: when that is dispossessed of, or not guided by righteousness, it takes in those qualities which are most conformable to its corrupted disposition, and suffers its superior faculties to be overpowered by them: thus the debauchée knows no law of action but his pleasures, nor moderation than inability to follow them.

If men sacrificed righteousness to the conveniencies and elegancies of life, and employed them to the good of the nation, such a sacrifice would indeed destroy the soul, yet (humanly speaking) not endanger the existence of the community, but the misfortune is, the sacrifice is seldom confined to such narrow limits: And
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we often see those, on whom fortune has shed her kindest favours, slaves to avarice and venality, and those possessions which should have suppressed worldly desires, inflame a thousand other vices: ambition, and all its train of evils, make them submit to the basest servility, and trample on every duty human or divine.

Ambition, founded on proper principles, is virtuous: when it prompts us to raise our minds to divine wisdom, and fill our souls with righteousness, it is delightful and excellent: but if it leads us to arrogate the power of God, to shake off religious and moral obligations; if it so turns our brain, as to make us think we are great, because we dare trample on the laws of God and ridicule his worship; it will be so far from amiable, that it will expose the weakness of our intellects and depravity of our hearts. Were its effects merely personal, the object may deserve pity and compassion; and becoming recluse, recover some degree of moderation and understanding. But, horrid to relate! the disposition of this vice, is violent and pestilential: nothing can stop its career: justice and mercy are disregarded; nor does it feel the least compunction, in spreading national desolation, or involving the opponents to its aims in wretchedness and destruction.

From hence arise intestine divisions, faction and tumult, weakening the natural strength of the kingdom, interrupting the wheel of government, and depriving it of those powers which might have been exercised with advantage and glory.

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These impediments to national prosperity, burthensome and fatal to the noble operations which union produces, are trivial in comparison with those scenes of destruction: the effects of this vice spread amongst the labouring part of the people, who are no less the bulwark of the nation in its fleets and armies, than the sinews of the commercial world. Look now into their neat, though humble habitations, you will see the reign of industry: the father, mother, and children exercising their abilities in the several branches of their occupation: coarse clothing and moderate meals terminate their desires; exclude anxiety and care: comfort extends her balmy wings, and florid health beams on every countenance.

How soon is this pleasing scene changed: the ambitious man comes amongst them, solicits their votes to raise him to his wished-for honours; and instead of pleading his own merits, or the benefit the kingdom has received from his ancestors virtues, he opens a torrent of excess, riot and extravagance; men, women, and children are kept continually drunk; blasphemy and debauchery, strife and bloodshed are heard and seen daily in the streets: hatred and variance then formed, are never eradicated. Insanity occasioned by drunkenness, rages in a thousand shapes: in some it drives the passions to anger and fury; others defy the tribunal of heaven; others curse their own existence, sink into despondency, and put an end to their being: whilst others in heaps lie gasping on the ground; the distended mouth, and pale emaciated visage, denoting

noting their internal burnings, display a scene no less full of horror, than degrading to human nature. What is the general consequence of this conduct? numbers of these voters do not survive the debauch; industry flies the debilitated residue; their houses sink into ruins; and the remains of their wretched beings are deposited in hospitals.

The ruinous effects of these proceedings do not stop here: the expences which have caused this desolation, have impaired the private fortune, and means must be found to repay the sums which have been dissipated to acquire the honour of serving their country; being servicable in that important station, might promote them to valuable and eminent employments: but where there are no distinguishing abilities, that resource may fail: what then remains, but to hazard the ruins of their patrimony at the gaming table?

Not to insist that the principles of this resource are immoral; nor to dwell on the trifling intimation, that the seeds of Virtue planted in the human mind, and all the nobler faculties of the soul are disregarded, and suppressed by it; I will consider its effects on its devotees, male and female.

The frowns of chance are as frequent as her smiles: the transition is sudden: and opposite passions reign by turns, distort, soften, and swell the muscles. Here you may see the finest faces, formed for the most delightful and virtuous purposes, a prey to rage and envy; the tyranny of the most sordid passions, and the lineaments of fury stamped on the seat of every grace
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and beauty. Are these the ornaments of the most delicate, modest, and charming part of the Creation? Do they warm the affection of the wife, the tenderness of the mother, or secure conjugal fidelity? Do they incite the regard, or engage the lover's vows? However fashionable this Vice may be, it must discourage matrimony, particularly in the higher stations of life, and make it dreaded, as big with ruin and misery.

The rage of this Vice is still more predominant amongst men. It is really amazing to see nobles associate with thieves and robbers: those, whose natural and improved abilities, qualify them for the most important offices in the state, dissipating their time and fortunes in a crowd of execrable wretches blaspheming Providence. One day you see them smiling in all the pride of affluence, title, and distinction, surrounded with wealth and honour, inhabiting superb houses and seats adorned with all the beauties which luxuriant nature and art can convey: the next, deprived of them, involved in poverty, misery, and despair, unable to bear the sight of their injured families, or the torment of their own reflection, fly their country, or daringly rush from worldly shame, into the presence of offended God. Is it not much to be lamented, that the most wholesome laws are thus openly violated, and the vitals of the kingdom are thus wantonly torn? Does this do honour to the policy of a refined nation? or argue a regard for her laws and institutions? Thus countenanced, is it to be wondered that the inferior part of the kingdom so warmly follow the example of

their superiors? The spirit of imitation was never so prevalent in any age as the present. Pleasure is the universal pursuit: it is the subject of discourse, the spring of action, and arbitress of the soul: the master and his servant are not seldom undistinguished by their dress: the Lady and her woman wear similar attire: the noble and vulgar, Princes and mechanics appear in publick assemblies with the same splendor, and glare of adornment. If the great give balls, routs, and entertainments: even their domestics act over the recent scenes, and wallow in profusion, extravagance, and debauchery. What but ruin must attend this boldly-assumed parity? the resources for it must soon fail; honesty is encroached upon to keep alive the embers of dying vanity, and they fall victims to folly and imprudence.

I would not be understood to decry all pleasure; under the guidance of reason, it is agreeable to Religion and Nature, necessary to relax the mind from serious reflection, and bring the faculties into harmony and order; but to be the object of constant attention, and transgress the bounds of prudence in the pursuit of it, is pernicious to the mind as well as the body. The indulgence of sensual appetites and inordinate passions, bring a lassitude and decay on the understanding; reason from disuse will decline, and the vital powers grow heavy and corrupt from a want of action; the brain, the blood and spirits on which the mental faculties must operate to keep the human system in order, grow stiff, congealed, and morbid. Can the
brain,

brain, the seat of judgment and reflection, when inflamed by drunkenness, arrange and display those beautiful images which are impressed upon it? Can the animal spirits produce the noble and sublime conceptions of reason, when loaded with gluttony? Can the mind, agitated by anger, form impartial opinions? Can the blood, boiling with wanton desires, admit clear ideas? Can the understanding be just, when it is encompassed by a thick cloud of lust entangled by dissipation, and distressed by the jarings of a disordered and debilitated body? It is impossible! an universal harmony must prevail, or nature will shrink from its proper excellence. Purity is as necessary to mental perception, as the eye is to discern material objects: the more free the mind is from the fumes of lust and sensuality, the more ready, exact, and sublime will be its operations; the higher it soars above the tyranny of appetite and passion, the more it will be filled with those graces and excellencies which form the man.

It is the interest and duty of every individual to countenance Virtue in each other; to support it with the tenaciousness and delicacy paid to personal honour. Can a magistrate disregard the character of just, without exposing his authority, or risking the loss of that respect which is derived from an opinion of his equity? Can we refuse an impartial executor of justice the applause due to his virtuous principles? Would it not argue our own baseness? Is not every regular conformist to the duties of civil society, who by so acting, avows
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a refined morality, an object of every honest man's regard? Veneration and esteem are only due to Virtue. Could our laws, which carry with them such distinguished perfectness, be possessed of their reputation and worth, were they not founded on higher principles, than merely temporal? The disposition of human nature cannot be improved by itself: the best attributes of man, and all the force and power of our minds, are acknowledged favours of God.

The various arts in which human genius discovers the greatest strength and ability, too often weaken the vital principle which puts them in action, and call for human laws to restrain the corruption which flows from the very endowments. Human barriers against vice, however aided by the wisdom of the Legislature, can only have a partial effect; and a multiplicity of laws enacted to redress particular grievances at different periods, from the mutability of of things, and variation of circumstances, cannot but clash virtually, spiritually, positively, or by implication, and be so far from a clear and firm security to property and order, the sacred guardians of Justice, Truth, and Virtue, that their intention and power must often revert to the wisdom of an individual. The wisest of our schemes partake of human weakness, are fluctuating and unsteady; and not seldom relying on treachery, cunning, and artifice for their support, add contempt to frailty.

Where

Where then can a nation, society, or people, look for a firm and immutable foundation to build on, a guide to direct and govern their actions?

It has been proved, that the guidance of reason alone is ineffectual; that uncontrolled passions are subversive of empire, fatal to peace, order, and every thing amiable and honourable amongst men. Let us not vainly compliment our natural ability, but fly to nobler aids, and more exalted powers. Let us clothe ourselves with righteousness, which animating the genius we have seen, will produce peace, health, honour, and reputation. All glorious in her origin, she, like wisdom, dispels the clouds of Vice and Ignorance, Wisdom vii. 25. "is a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty." 26. "the brightness of the everlasting light." 27. "entering into souls, she maketh them the friends of God and the Prophets." 29. "more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars."

This pure influence raises Reason to Wisdom, Wisdom vii. 22. "makes it subtil, lively, clear, undefiled, plain; not subject to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, ready to do good." 23. "kind to man, steadfast;" fills every individual with all possible happiness, and establishes that beautiful harmony, which is the stability of society, and strength of nations, on the basis of affection and conscience.

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